

## 10 Great Workouts to Spice Up Your Running Program

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Too many beginning runners have but one speed: medium. And as someone who's run a marathon, a few half marathons and a bunch of shorter races, I know that such a one-speed workout program can be not only boring, but it also doesn't maximize your workouts.

Throw some variety into your running program to make things interesting and become a better runner.



Photo by [mikebaird](#)

I'm not saying you have to start a marathon training program, or some kind of sprint workout program. But if the only speed you're running right now is medium, you should consider and at least try some other types of workouts.

Why? Just a few reasons:

1. **They make things interesting.** Doing the same workout, day after day, isn't a lot of fun. Sure, I enjoy running as much as the next guy, but changing things up is good. Too much repetition is hard on the mind.
2. **It can make you faster and stronger.** Throwing a little speed into your workouts can make you a better runner. If you have the same 5K time every time, it may be that you need some faster workouts.
3. **It can help you run longer.** If you ever want to do a longer race, such as a 20K, half marathon or marathon, you need to switch from medium speed to slow ... in order to work on your endurance. Slowing your speed down (lowering intensity) allows you to run longer. And if you slowly lengthen the distance of your longest run, you can slowly build up endurance.
4. **Your body adapts.** After a month or so of doing one type of workout, your body will adapt and you'll no longer be getting the same kind of benefits from that workout. You need to change things up every 3-4 weeks ... and if you do, you'll most likely see continued improvements.

I should note that if you're just starting out as a runner, I wouldn't do the harder workouts below for at least a couple months. Your body is still adjusting to running ... once it's done that, you can add a little variety.

I should also note, as always, that I'm just an intermediate runner myself, and not a coach or trainer or doctor or anything. Take my advice with a grain (or bucketload) of salt ... I'm only sharing things that have worked for me, and your mileage may vary.

So, let's take a look at just a few different types of workouts you can do to add spice to your running program and improve your performance:

1. **The long run.** Basically, it's just extending how long you can run by a little. For marathons, a long run is usually considered 16 or more miles, but for people training for shorter races, shorter runs can still be considered long runs. It's been said that the long run IS marathon training ... because while you need to do more than your long runs to train for the marathon, the long run is what helps you build the endurance you need for the marathon. But (shorter) long runs can be used for any type of runner — if you're trying to do better at the 5K, run longer than 3.1 miles so that the 5K is easy (endurance wise). To add long runs to your program, just schedule one workout a week where you try to add 10% to your longest run (in recent training — don't count long runs you did a few years back). So if the longest you've run recently is 3 miles, try running 3.3 miles one week, and then 3.6 miles the next week, and so on. Every 4 weeks, cut back on your long run to give your body a chance to rest — it can't continue to build endurance without a break. When you do your long runs, slow down a little and try to run nice steady runs at easy pace.
2. **Hills.** Once you've built up a little endurance, hills are a perfect way to add strength to your training. Hills are like lifting weights for runners — you're fighting gravity to lift your bodyweight with your legs, in a running motion. To do hill workouts, you could do hill repeats — run up a hill, then coast back down it, and repeat. But I recommend finding a hilly course (the road near my house is very hilly) so that your hill workout has a little variety. Run strong up the hills and coast down them. If you've never done hill workouts before, take it easy in the beginning, as with any exercise. Just run slow up the hills and slow down them, until you get used to it.
3. **The Fartlek.** The funny name literally means "speed play" in Swedish, and it's one of my favorite "speed" workouts. It's actually a great starter workout for those who aren't used to speed or interval training. Instead of hitting the track, take to your usual course on the road (or trail or wherever). Here's how it works: warm up for 5-10 minutes, then start a series of varied intervals with speed and rest periods. So you could choose a landmark and run hard to it, and then jog to recover, and then choose another landmark and run hard to that, and so on. Fartleks can be extremely varied, so you could do shorter sprint intervals, followed by longer hard and steady intervals, throw in some hills, and so on. I recommend you do it to have fun ... run hard for as long as you want, then rest for a short while, then run hard again. As you do these fartlek workouts, you'll get stronger and faster, and your intervals will get harder and longer as you go on.
4. **Tempo run.** This is a staple of many intermediate and advanced runner's training plans, and if you don't know this run yet, you should get to know it. Basically, it's a sustained run at a hard, controlled pace (usually for no more than 40 minutes). Beginners should start with a tempo run of about 5 minutes and work up to about 20. Always start and end a tempo run with 5-10 minutes of warmup and then cool down. So a tempo run of 20 minutes, for example, would be 5-10 minutes warmup, 20 minutes of steady, hard and controlled running, and another 5-10 minutes to cool down, for 30-40 minutes total. The tempo run improves your running pace and performance and makes your running more efficient. A variation is the tempo interval, which is two or more shorter tempo runs (say, 10-20 minutes) separated by a few minutes of easy pace. Tempo runs should be done slower than 5K or 10K pace, but faster than half marathon pace.
5. **Road intervals.** There are track intervals (more on those below) and there are road intervals, and both types of intervals come in a variety of flavors. I group the road intervals together here because they're all very similar, in my opinion, although the variations are aimed to give the runner different benefits. But basically, it's a 5-10 minute warm up, a series of harder intervals (with rest intervals in between, where you can either jog at easy pace or walk at fast pace), and then another 5-10 minute cool down. Variations include Cruise Intervals (popularized by legendary coach Jack Daniels), where you run 3-8 minute intervals at 8-12K pace with recovery intervals of 30 seconds to 2 minutes; tempo intervals (see above); aerobic intervals of distances from 400m to 2K at a 3K to 8K pace, with recovery jogs of about half the distance of each interval.
6. **HIIT.** Short for High-Intensity Interval Training, HIIT is all the rage in many exercise circles, because of studies showing that it's good for fat-burning and you can get a good workout in less time. Basically it's a series of near-maximum intensity sprints with less-intense recovery intervals (after a warm up of course) and usually lasts between 10-20 minutes (not counting warm up and cool down). HIIT, because of the intensity of the intervals, can be very tough. I recommend building up to it with medium-distance track intervals 200 to 800 meter repeats.
7. **Yasso 800s.** This strange name was given to an interesting workout by Amby Burfoot of Runner's World magazine, named after his friend and co-worker at Runner's World, Bart Yasso. Basically, it's a form of speed training for marathoners, but you could adapt it for other training. How it works: you do 10 repeats of 800 meters (on the track), working up to a certain goal time. The goal time is figured by taking your goal marathon time (let's say 3 hours and 30 minutes, or 3:30) and turning it from hours and minutes to minutes and seconds (in this example, it would be 3 minutes and 30 seconds per 800m repeat, or 3:30). So according to this theory, if you can do 10 repeats of 3:30 (3 minutes and 30 seconds), with 3:30 jogging rest intervals in between, you can do a 3:30 marathon (assuming you're doing the appropriate long runs and other slower

mileage).

8. **Mile repeats.** Another track repeat workout, mile repeats are exactly how they sound — a mile at strong pace, followed by a couple laps of recovery, and repeat. I've done perhaps 4 repeats of a mile. You could do other distances — 1000m, 800m, 400m, etc.
9. **Zen run.** Not really a workout, but something I like to do to change things up, especially if I've been doing some of the harder runs above. I call it a "Zen run" because my goal is not to improve performance or burn a lot of calories, but to focus on being present as I run. It helps me be more aware of my body, my surroundings, and my thoughts, and I find this very useful, as a runner and as a person. See [this article](#) for more.
10. **Rest.** OK, this is not a workout at all (well, it could be ... read on for more). But I thought it important to include "rest" on this list because it's too often ignored by many runners. They run hard every day and don't think they need to rest ... but rest is *just* as important as the workout for getting fitter and faster ... because the way your body gets fitter is first from the stress of exercise and second by adapting to that stress during the rest or recovery period. If you're just a beginner, I recommend alternating running days with complete rest days. Later, you can add "recovery" runs in between harder workouts, instead of complete rest, but recovery runs must be run at a very, very easy pace ... basically, just to get your legs moving. You aren't trying to go fast or long on a recovery run. Always use the hard-easy rule — if you run hard one day, rest or do a very easy recovery run the next. A hard run is any run where you run relatively fast or hard or long.

**Have a favorite workout of your own? Let us know in the comments.**

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